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Ewing, Bronwyn F. (2008) Online exploration a must for kids' learning. In *QUT Media*, Queensland University of Technology.

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The use of Information Communications and Technology (ICT) to support teaching in early childhood learning contexts could easily be wasted if not used in the right way, according to a QUT academic.

Ms Bronwyn Ewing, a lecturer in the School of Early Childhood in the Faculty of Education has had an ongoing interest in the area of ICTs for young children and said that the vast capabilities of ICTs posed as many challenges as they did opportunities.

“When I am teaching undergraduate pre-service education students in the Faculty, I encourage them to evaluate ICTs, in particular, software and website resources, and to consider their suitability for early learners,” she said.

“They are encouraged to analyse the approaches underpinning the resources and to ask questions. For example, are they drill and practice exercises? Can the children inquire and explore topics of interest? What learning is going to occur as a consequence of working through topics.”

“At its best, ICTs provide children with the chance to learn and investigate their social world, bringing the real world into a teaching and learning context.

“However, there are software and websites claiming that they are interactive when in fact they are more like drill and practice exercise; this issue is particularly evident in some mathematics software and websites, and in this instance, questions about what is being learned are crucial.”

With ICTs a growing phenomenon in kindergartens and schools, there are a number of ways to approach teaching using ICTs.

Ms Ewing said that it is important to consider the effectiveness of each approach to get the best out of ICTs.

“If you take a paper copy of a drill and practice sheet and represent that on a computer, you have to question the worth of putting children on the computer,” she said.

She said the use of interactive or investigative resources were more effective tools for sustaining children’s engagement in learning than routine tasks.

“Engagement in this sense refers to involvement in deep understanding, valuing what is being done and actively participating in learning tasks. The result is a substantial sense of satisfaction and investment in learning,” she said.

“Resources that present investigative problems to children that relate to their health and wellbeing for example, assists them to look for reasons behind actions and to explore associated problems linked to the topic.”

Ms Ewing, whose research focuses largely on the practices employed in mathematics classrooms to teach mathematics for effective learning, said she was interested in ICT because of its potential to teach children about the world and how to interact in it.

She teaches ICT and the Young Child to QUT Primary, Primary TEFL and Early Childhood undergraduate pre-service educators. She has written about it in the Early Childhood Teachers' Association Journal.

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****Hi-res pic available for media**